

I Do It For You by LovelyinLavender

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Summary: Summer 1986. They say that nothing brings people together quite like trauma does. Eleven and Max meet the guys...guys who thought nothing interesting ever happened in Hawkins. As the summer wears on, these teens will laugh, fight, fall in love, and come up against something they never imagined. Usual pairings!

1. Prologue

Disclaimer: I don't own Stranger Things or any of the characters in this story.

I DO IT FOR YOU

Prologue: Summer, 1985

Billy Hargrove was your average, ordinary 18 year old guy, until there was one night when he wasn't.

He had a father, a stepmother, and a stepsister. The four of them had come from California to Hawkins last year, and Billy hated every second of it. There was zero fun to be had in Hawkins. All he wanted was to go back to California and spend time with his friends, his surfboard, and *her*.

Billy's mom had left him and his dad when he was a young boy. It both broke his heart, and made him angrier than he'd ever been. It wasn't fair. It wasn't fair that she left him, and it wasn't fair how his dad had been treating his mom. But Billy loved and missed her so much. She had to be in California, still, after all this time. She loved the wind and the waves just as much as Billy. She was the one who introduced him to surfing, after all.

Until he could save up to go back to California, however, he was spending his summer working at the Hawkins Community Pool as a lifeguard. Swimming in the Pacific Ocean had trained Billy well, and he was one of the best lifeguards they had. The pool also experienced quite an uptake in female attendance while Billy was working. With his brooding stare, washboard abs, and golden skin, he was extremely easy on the eyes...and he knew it, too.

He smiled as he worked, thinking of one of the pool's regulars. Karen Wheeler and her friends were fun to get riled up. They brought their kids to the pool almost every day, and Billy could feel their eyes on him as he walked on the pool deck towards the lifeguard stand. He made sure to add a little extra swagger to his step for their benefit.

"Probably the most excitement they get all day," he thought. But secretly, the ladies weren't the only ones enjoying themselves. If Billy was being completely honest with himself, Karen was actually kind of hot for a mom. He remembered one particular day when she was climbing out of the pool after doing laps. It was like the pool scene with Phoebe Cates in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* had come to life. With her wet hair slicked back, and her swimsuit clinging to all the right places...

"Shit," he muttered under his breath. Upon looking down, he saw he now had a problem that needed attending to. But not now...not when he needed to finish closing up the pool. It was dark now, and all that was left was locking up the equipment and the gate to the pool. He'd just have to hang onto that image for later when he got home, or maybe he'd make a detour to Cindy's place after work. She was always willing when he was...

With a quiet click, Billy locked the padlock to the equipment shed. Just as he was turning to go out the pool gate, a flash caught his eye. One of the lights in the pool was now blinking slowly. "That's odd," he thought. Usually if those lights were burning out, they would just go off. As he watched the light, it began blinking faster, more erratically. Billy couldn't look away – it was hypnotic. He began edging closer to the side of the pool where the light was, almost like a magnet was pulling him closer. Suddenly, the light stopped blinking and grew steadily brighter – so bright, it made Billy shield his eyes – until...

Nothing.

The sudden absence of light was a shock to Billy, and he stumbled and fell before his eyes could adjust. His palms stung on the concrete as he caught himself, and he knew he probably had gotten badly scraped. "Fuck," Billy yelped. He blew out a long breath and stayed seated for a few extra seconds to collect himself.

Billy didn't realize it, but those few extra seconds had cost him dearly.

He didn't realize that the breath he expelled masked the sound of the gurgling inhale behind him.

He barely had time to register the arms were now around his upper body, pulling him to God knows where.

All Billy knew from then on...was darkness.

I'm back! I hope you'll take the time to review my story – it would mean a lot. I'll try to update every week or so. Lots of ideas rattling around in my head.

2. Chapter 1: Run to You

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Chapter 1: Run to You

One year later. Summer, 1986.

There's a certain feeling in the air when summer arrives – an excitement that was dormant during the winter and spring. The nights are longer, the days are hotter, and hemlines get shorter. Even though you know summer never lasts, you can't help but feel like it could go on forever.

Of course, Hawkins is no Florida or California, but the people in that small town had their ways of savoring summer, too: beach days at Lovers' Lake, bonfires at the quarry, camping trips, and afternoons at the arcade. Another popular hang out spot, especially among teenagers, was Benny's Burgers. It was this little hole-in-the-wall place, home to the best burgers and milkshakes in town...which was ironic, because it wasn't even really in town. The restaurant backed up to a wooded area, practically in the next town over. Maybe that's why it appealed to teens. It was their idea of a getaway, without actually leaving Hawkins.

Another great thing about Benny's? Every Friday night during the summer, he allowed a local band to play a set on the back patio. Benny Hammond might have had a gruff exterior, but he loved kids, and loved giving them a chance to show off their talents. Tonight's band? Rules as Written, or "RAWWWWW" as Dustin would snarl among his bandmates. He was all for just calling the band RAW, and have that be their public image. But he was quickly vetoed by Mike, Lucas, and Will. These were D & D lovers, after all. They didn't want their name to sound like something a professional wrestler would scream at a match.

While we're on the subject of D & D, these boys were about as obsessed as you could get. Despite being 15 years old, they still held

a campaign almost every weekend...and had no intention of stopping any time soon. They were very devoted D & D players, so it only made sense to name their band after D & D terminology. The idea of forming a band came up during one of their campaigns a couple of years ago. Mike wasn't a bad guitar player already – there was an old guitar in the basement that he found himself strumming sometimes. Dustin used to be in choir. Lucas would always drum along with a song on the radio. Will was a wealth of musical knowledge, mostly thanks to his older brother Jonathan.

After practicing and a lot of hard work, the boys were ready to make their debut at Benny's. Little did they know that two of the show attendees would change their lives forever.

El Hopper and Max Mayfield were the best of friends. They had met last year under very strange and tragic circumstances...in the woods, of all places. Max's older stepbrother Billy hadn't come home from work one night, which wasn't unusual for him. But what was unusual was the fact that his body had been found face-down in the Hawkins pool the next day. Max hated her brother's erratic behavior, but had loved him just the same. She was heartbroken, and ran off to her secret hideout in the woods. Max had found the empty tool shed after one night when she wanted some peace and quiet. Her stepfather Neil was yelling at Billy for one reason or another. The little tool shed was perfect for her. She decorated the walls with posters of her idols Ralph Macchio and Tony Hawk. She also kept some pillows, blankets, a change of clothes, Eggos, Twinkies, Capri Sun pouches, and a Walkman on hand. As far as Max knew, nobody knew about the shed in the woods. Imagine her surprise when she walked up to it that fateful afternoon, and found the padlock on the door busted open.

She slowly opened the door – house keys in hand, ready to stab whatever scumbag had broken in. That was not necessary, however, as the perpetrator was sound asleep under her blankets. Said perpetrator had to settle for a verbal tongue-lashing.

"Who the FUCK are you?! And how DARE you break my lock!"

The sleeping person let out a startled cry and sat up, revealing

themselves to Max. *Holy shit*, Max thought to herself. This hardened criminal looked no older than she. At first glance, it might have been a boy – the hair was shaved so short. But no...it was a girl, and she looked scared out of her mind.

Max tried to soften her tone. "Look, I'm sorry I swore at you, but you can't just break into things that don't belong to you."

The girl was puzzled. "Break. In," she asked softly.

"Yeah, break in," Max said, cocking her eyebrow. "You know, like when a door is locked and you force your way in? Like what burglars do?"

The girl did not look like she understood any better. "Brrr-guh-lurrs?" She tested the word, and how it felt to say it.

Who is this space cadet, thought Max. She knelt down next to her. "That's right. Burglars. People who come into people's houses, and sometimes they take things that don't belong to them. Did you take anything of mine?"

"No," she shook her head emphatically. "Just sleeping. Was cold."

Something was definitely weird about this girl. For starters, she didn't seem to understand what Max considered to be basic vocabulary. Secondly, her appearance. There was the shaved head, but she also didn't have any shoes on, and looked to be wearing only a hospital gown. And was that dried blood under her nostril...? Max felt suddenly compassionate. She had just lost her brother, but this girl looked even more rough. Where did she come from, and how long had she been wandering around?

"Listen, I've got some other clothes you could put on. Would you like that?"

"Yes."

Max handed her a t-shirt and sweatpants, then turned around to give her some privacy while she changed. "So what's your name," she asked after a couple of minutes. She felt a tap on her shoulder, and turned around to see the space cadet extending her arm towards her.

Max squinted at what looked like a tiny tattoo spelling out the numbers *011*.

"Holy shit," Max exclaimed. "You're like my age. What are you doing with a tattoo? That's pretty badass." The girl shook her head, pointed at the tattoo, then pointed at herself. "Wait, is that your name? Eleven?"

"Yes."

Max felt like the wind had been knocked out of her. It's like she didn't really understand the world anymore. First, her brother dies...then she finds a strange girl with a tattoo in the woods. Who tattoos a child, shaves their head, and dresses them in a hospital gown? And what about the blood under her nose? Max felt the sudden need to protect her.

Tears welled in her eyes. "Well Eleven, my name's Max...short for Maxine. Can I call you El? Short for Eleven?"

El smiled shyly. "Okay."

"Okay," Max agreed. "So, do you want to come back to my house with me? My stepdad's an asshole, but my mom's alright. We can take care of you."

The blood drained from El's face. "No."

"What do you mean? You don't want to stay out here in the woods. Let's go."

Max pulled the handle on the shed door, only to have it ripped from her grasp as the door slammed shut. She turned around slowly to look at El, who now had fresh blood dripping out of her nose.

"No."

The girls talked during the rest of the afternoon. El learned about what had just happened to Billy, and Max learned more about El. And there was a LOT to learn. For starters, El was telekinetic. She wasn't sure why she got a nosebleed after she used her powers, but

she figured out that she needed to limit herself so as not to get drained. As for where she came from, it was hard for El to describe, but Max was able to piece together that she'd escaped from Hawkins National Laboratory. She lived there her whole life, while doctors tested her brain activity and abilities. She hated it there. She never got to go outside...never got to have treats...never got to go to a real school. All these people that were supposedly her "friends" were the same ones that threw her into a tiny cell when she didn't do what they wanted. But she had managed to escape the lab during the aftermath of an experiment gone wrong.

El never wanted to go back, and so it was very important that her existence outside the lab be kept a secret.

Max was suddenly fearful, because her little shed was in fairly close proximity to the lab. If anyone started looking for El, there's a good chance they would find her here. She didn't want to think about what would happen to El or herself if that time came.

The girls both agreed that El would stay at the shed for that night only, and then they would figure something else out for subsequent nights. Max was grateful she'd had snacks and drinks on hand. She also showed El how to use the Walkman before she left for the night, so El could listen to music.

"I promise you...I'll be back tomorrow morning, El," Max said, as she took one last look around.

"Promise," asked El.

"Yeah, it means something you can't break. Ever," explained Max. She reached over and gave El a tentative hug. "I'll see you tomorrow. Sleep good."

El didn't have to be told twice. She snuggled under the blankets and drifted off into the best sleep she'd ever had. Needless to say, Max stayed true to her word and was back in the morning. And she continued to prove to Eleven that she was someone that could be trusted over the next year.

The girls were so excited about the show at Benny's tonight. They hadn't really been able to venture out together, so as to keep El protected. But it had been mutually decided that after a year, they could probably take it a little easier.

In her quest to ensure El stayed safe, Max found an ally in someone surprising: the Hawkins chief of police, Jim Hopper. For about a week or so after El escaped the lab, she stayed in a different place each night. During this time, Max feverishly researched a more permanent place for her to stay. She also tried to find out more information on the lab, to get a sense of what El might have gone through.

Max got more than she bargained for.

As she scrolled through old volumes of the *Hawkins Post*, she read stories about kidnappings...Project MK Ultra...sensory deprivation tanks...lawsuits...

A familiar face caught her eye.

Chief Hopper and his then-wife Diane were on the front page of the newspaper in 1979, well before Max and her family had come to Hawkins. They had sued the lab after the death of their daughter Sara. According to the article, the Hoppers lived about a mile from the lab. One afternoon, Sara was playing outside when she suddenly collapsed. She was rushed to the hospital, but was pronounced dead upon arrival. The cause of death, according to the autopsy, was asphyxiation. Doctors found a large piece of cookie lodged in her throat. But the chief was immediately suspicious. Diane was outside with Sara the whole time, and Sara was never given any snacks.

The article continued to detail how Chief Hopper had taken samples of dirt in his backyard and had them tested for toxic substances. Those samples tested positive. But when he presented those findings in court, the lab responded with their own samples...which were negative. The inconclusive test results, plus the cookie found in Sara's throat meant the lab was found not guilty.

Hopper was heartbroken. Unfortunately, the stress over their daughter's death and the results of the trial put a strain on his and

Diane's marriage. They divorced not long after.

Here Max thought Hopper was just some grumpy old douchebag who hated fun – he always seemed to pop out of nowhere and tell her to stop using her skateboard so much, that skateboarders ultimately became pot-smoking burnouts or got brain damage from falling so much. For starters, Max had no intention of becoming a burnout. She liked school – science especially – and wanted to go to college. Secondly, Max NEVER fell off her skateboard. Even if she were to, at least she'd have her helmet on.

But maybe Hopper had a reason to be grumpy. Maybe he was still hurting.

Max vividly remembered going to visit Hopper that first time at the police station, armed with her new knowledge. At first, he refused to talk to her about the lab. But Max was persistent. She told him all about El: how she had escaped, how she had been treated at the lab, and how she stumbled on Max's hideout. Max could tell the wheels were turning in Hopper's head. He asked where El was staying at that moment. Together, they went to see her in the alley behind The Hawk movie theater. Max had created a makeshift fort for El out of wooden pallets.

She knelt down to let El know that a friend wanted to meet her – a REAL friend, not like the mean ones from the lab. Her secrets were safe with Hopper, and he would not send her back to the lab. After a few seconds, El nodded her assent.

As soon as Jim Hopper came face to face with El, it was like a dam burst. At the sight of her little face and shorn hair, the tears began to flow. All the memories of his poor Sara came flooding to the forefront.

El had been studying Hopper ever since he walked up with Max. She seemed to see something in his face that she trusted, and she gently touched his hand with hers. "Okay," she asked softly.

He let out a long exhale and nodded feverishly, wiping his eyes with his free hand. "Yeah, sweetheart. I'm okay. I think the more important question is, are you okay?"

"Am now," responded El slowly. "Better with Max."

Max smiled happily, thankful that El was able to trust her. "Thanks, space cadet. I'm better with you, too."

"What is space cadet?"

"Shit! Sorry, never mind," fumbled Max. "It's nothing."

"Anyway..." Hopper began, "El...Max told me about where you came from, and what happened to you. Like she said, I promise you, I won't tell anyone about you. It is important to me that you feel safe. Alright?"

"Alright."

"Good," said Hopper with a smile. "Now, I understand you've been staying in different places around town?"

Max rubbed the back of her neck sheepishly. "Yeah she has. I wish we could have found her nicer places to stay, but I don't really have a ton of money."

"It's okay, Max. You did good. You protected El," Hopper assured her. He then turned to El. "Listen, kid. I don't have a ton to offer you either. But I do have a cabin. We can fix it up nice...make it like a home. No one knows about it – well, except the three of us – so you'd be safe. But I've been looking to get out of my piece of shit trailer for a while. And I could use someone to share the space with. What do you say...want to stay with me?"

El's eyes shone brightly with unshed tears. "Home?"

"Yeah, kid. Home."

For her own safety, El was not allowed to leave the cabin. Instead, Max visited almost every day. She tutored El in reading, math, and science. Hopper was a big history buff, so he was the unofficial history tutor.

Under Max's eye, El became something of a girly girl. She loved makeup, and trying on the new clothes Max would bring her. She and

Max also loved watching soap operas that came on TV in the afternoon. Hopper would always roll his eyes when one such show would come on, but if it made El happy, then it was worth it.

"El? Hellooooo?"

El was broken out of her thoughts by Max's voice. "Sorry, I was just thinking."

"What about?"

El put her arm around Max. "I'm happy we met. And I'm lucky."

Max smiled. "I'm happy we met, too...but listen, the band's about to start," she said. "And I'm pretty sure Mike is checking you out!"

"Who is Mike?"

"One of the guys in the band. He's the tall, skinny guy with curly, dark brown hair. I go to school with him and the other guys in the group. They're alright...kind of nerdy, but alright. I didn't know they played instruments, though. Anyway, the other guys are Lucas, Dustin, and Will..."

Max continued to chatter as the band finished setting up their equipment. But El had tuned out after Max described who Mike was. He was DEFINITELY the cutest boy she had ever seen. Even cuter than the guys in the TV shows she and Max watched. Her eyes roamed across his angular face, peppered with freckles. She also had the sudden urge to touch his hair. It looked so soft.

Suddenly, Mike looked in her direction. She gasped and looked away, but not before she noticed just how deep his eyes were. She could get lost in them forever.

El chanced another look at Mike, who was still looking at her. This time when she looked up, he blushed and gave her a shy smile.

Oh. My.

This was going to be a great night.

Some backstory and ending fluff! Please leave a review.

3. Chapter 2: Summer of '69

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Chapter 2: Summer of '69

Mike Wheeler was a talented kid. At 15 years old, he was great at school, he'd won numerous science fairs, was the youngest president of the Hawkins High AV Club they'd ever had, he could write interesting and fun D & D campaigns, and was on his way to becoming proficient on guitar.

With girls, however, it was a different story.

Mike could not get a girlfriend for the life of him. It was two-fold. He had an awkward personality to begin with. This was a guy who was so random, it should have been his middle name. He was a wealth of knowledge on lots of different subjects. Mike tried to infuse these little tidbits into conversations...but it didn't always go smoothly. He also liked imitating people's voices. One minute, he was speaking like regular Mike. The next minute, it was Mike's British cousin. Oy vey.

The second facet was that he always seemed to turn into a sputtering mess around a pretty girl. Mike would either clam up or get a horrible case of verbal diarrhea.

But maybe tonight, his luck would change.

Mike spotted the pretty girl the moment she walked into the crowd. Her brown hair was short and wavy. She was wearing a cool black shirt with blue splotches on it. The splotches almost looked like planets in the Solar System. He couldn't help but wonder if she'd like to go stargazing with him one night. Finally, her jeans were held up by a pair of dark blue suspenders. He liked her style!

"Dude...uh, who are you looking at?"

Mike spun around frantically to face Dustin, who was giving him a

shit-eating grin. "What? Nobody...why?"

Dustin made a tsk-tsk noise and shook his head. "Au contraire, my friend! I know that look, and it's the pretty-lady-alert look."

"Pretty lady," interjected Lucas, popping up from behind his drums. "Where at?"

"Somewhere in the crowd. Ask Mike," replied Dustin. "He's been staring at some girl. He had that dopey look on his face."

"Fuck off," Mike hissed. "My face is NOT dopey."

"Guys, come ON," said Will. "We need to finish setting up. Do you want to sound like total assholes tonight?"

Dustin threw up his hands in exasperation. "God damn it, Byers. Why do you have to be all logical and shit?"

Will wagged his finger at his friends. "Will the Wise...and don't forget it."

As they went back to work, Mike felt the sudden urge to check out his pretty lady again. He couldn't suppress the grin from forming on his face as he saw her look frantically away from him. Seems as though he wasn't the only one who was interested. But he was caught off guard when she shyly looked back at him. Mike felt the redness of a blush stain his cheeks as he saw just how hazel her eyes were; how pink her lips were.

She wasn't merely pretty. She was beautiful.

El smiled back at Mike, his dark eyes seemingly sparkling as she did so. Her gaze moved down the long expanse of his neck to where it ended at his shirt collar. She had the sudden urge to kiss the exposed skin there...

She really needed to stop watching so many soap operas.

"Hello! Earth to El Hopper! Come in, El Hopper!"

Max's voice snapped her out of her reverie. She inhaled shakily.
"Yes?"

Max cackled. "Maybe I should start calling you Mrs. Wheeler instead."

"Who's Mrs. Wheeler?"

"You, if you play your cards right."

El frowned. "Play my cards?"

"It's a figure of speech. Wheeler is Mike's last name. You're obviously smitten with him. I can only imagine what it'll be like when the two of you actually meet. Probably nothing but kissing all day." El couldn't help but smile at the thought. She'd be okay with that.

"But anyway, who knows," continued Max. "If you guys get along and things go well, 10 years down the line...you could be married."

El thought about how marriage was portrayed in the books she read, and TV shows/movies she watched. Sure, in some of the soap operas she saw, there was some over-the-top drama. But for the most part, marriage seemed okay. It meant you got to have a lover and best friend for the rest of your life.

As El continued to ponder this, Benny Hammond stepped onto the stage. He lifted his arms to quiet everyone down. "Can I get everyone's attention? We've got a real treat for you tonight. It's their first time playing for you all. Please welcome to the stage Hawkins' own...Rules as Written!"

The guys stepped up to their respective instruments amidst the light applause – Will smiling shyly, Lucas pumping his fist in the air, Dustin hammering it up and bowing to the audience, and Mike...

Well, Mike...

"Ello, 'Awkins! I'm The Paladin! 'Oo's ready to rawk?"

Mike's nervous laugh/squeak broke the silence that followed.

"Um, Mike. I'm Mike."

"Nah, you're just a frog face," came a shout from the back of the crowd. Mike didn't have see him to know that it was his nemesis, Troy.

"And you're just an asshole," spat Dustin into the microphone, followed by a chorus of "oooooh's" from the audience.

"Hey," shouted Benny off to the side, "Less swearing, more music!"

Dustin saluted in Benny's direction. "Yes sir! Sorry sir!"

Eleven had been watching the exchange between Mike and this other *mouthbreather*. While she didn't quite understand why Mike had started talking differently – or what a Paladin was, for that matter – she thought it was pretty rude of this other boy to call Mike a frog face. His face in no way resembled a frog. She should know – she'd been staring at it for quite some time.

She was lucky, however, that she happened to glance behind herself in the direction of the mouthbreather. He had a Styrofoam cup of what looked like strawberry milkshake, and was preparing to throw it directly at Mike.

Not on my watch, she thought.

It was like time slowed down. As Troy began to wind up, El concentrated as hard as she could on that cup. Almost immediately after it left his hand, it exploded in mid-air, raining down on the girl in front of him.

"EEEEEEEEK," she screamed. "Troy, what the fuck?!"

For his part, Troy looked mortified. "Holy shit, I didn't mean to, Stacy! I was aiming at frog face!"

"Aim better next time, you douche!" With that, she grabbed his t-shirt collar and dumped her French fries down his front.

That was all it took for someone to yell, "FOOD FIGHT!"

The air then became a mess of screaming, milkshakes, burgers, and hot dogs. El had never seen anything like it. She looked frantically

around for Max, who from the looks of things, was joining in on the food fight, too. Max was crouched behind a chair, and was scooping up fries from the ground to throw at people.

El swung around to try and figure out what her next move was, when suddenly, she was splashed clear in the face with a stream of chocolate milkshake. She gasped and covered her eyes, the intrusion making them water and burn.

As she began to sink to the ground in fear and pain, she felt a pair of arms lift her back up. "Are you okay? I've got you."

She wanted to cry in relief, but also in embarrassment. This was not how she wanted her first meeting with the cutest boy on earth to go. Plus, she was covered in chocolate milkshake.

El tried to open her eyes amidst the stinging, but could only just squint. Her vision was blurred, and Mike's face swam in front of hers. "Mike?"

"Yeah, I'm Mike. Let's get you out of here."

He got her inside as the melee continued, and helped her into the bathroom. "Come on, we've got to rinse your eyes out. I'll hold your hair back if you rinse, okay?"

El nodded feebly. "Okay."

Mike gently pulled her hair away from her face as she began to splash her eyes, taking care not to accidentally tug too hard. Some of the strands of her hair were coated with sticky milkshake, and smelled like chocolate. But Mike could also pick up on something flowery and fresh. He'd have to do some research later and figure out what it was.

After a few minutes, El reached up and turned off the water. Mike handed her a wad of paper towel to dry her face. Thankfully, the stinging had subsided quite a bit, and El could now freely look up and see her rescuer up close.

Good lord.

He was quite a bit taller than she – a good 6 inches taller. El liked that. She could just imagine snuggling in his arms and tucking her head under his chin. But up close, El was able to see just how many freckles Mike had running across his nose and his wonderfully sculpted cheeks.

"Hey...are you okay?"

His voice snapped her out of her trance and she looked back into his eyes. His beautiful, dark eyes... Ugh, El was turning into a sap.

"Yes. Thank you, Mike."

"Of course, m'lady." *Shit.* Why did his British accent have to come out now? Mike smacked his forehead in embarrassment. He wasn't expecting, however, that El would try to mimic him back.

Her eyes screwed up in concentration as she tried to form her words in this new voice. "You ah soooo coined."

Mike grinned hugely. It was clear this girl was not great at accents – who was he kidding, neither was he – but she was trying. No one, and certainly not a girl, ever played along when he got this random. He needed to hold on to this one. But first, he needed to find out her name.

"So, I don't really want to have to call you milkshake girl from now on. What's your name?"

El grinned back at him. "El. Short for Eleanor." This was what she and Hopper had agreed would be her formal name.

"El...that's really pretty."

She had been doing very well with her social skills and mannerisms over the last year, and had learned a great deal. But occasionally, she did slip up. Like when, for example, her hand suddenly made its way into Mike's thick hair.

Ugh. She had guessed right. Soooooo soft.

Mike was frozen in place – not expecting El's reaction, but not shying

away from it either. He kind of liked it, actually.

"What kind of shampoo do you use?"

He barked out a laugh, but quickly stopped when he saw El's face. Apparently, it was a genuine question. He just hadn't thought he'd be talking with her about shampoo.

"Um, I'm not sure. It's whatever my mom buys."

"Well, I like it. It makes your hair all fluffy."

Mike had the sudden urge to run home and find out what shampoo it was...then buy his weight in that shampoo.

He could feel his cheeks getting red. "Thanks. I, uh...I like your hair, too."

El giggled. "Thanks." She was suddenly aware that her hand was still in Mike's hair. But she couldn't bring herself to care. And he wasn't stopping her either.

She decided to let her hand roam across his cheek, and all the freckles that were there. "Like stars," she murmured.

"What," Mike asked just as softly.

"The freckles on your face," El clarified. "There are so many...they look like stars."

Mike remembered that he wondered if she'd like to go stargazing sometime. He decided to be brave and just ask. "Hey El?"

Bang.

The bathroom door flew open, breaking the couple out of their bubble and revealing a smirking Max. She looked behind herself and shouted, "Found 'em!"

Dustin appeared around the corner, his eyes covering his hands. "We're not interrupting anything are we? Were you two sucking face?"

"Or sucking something else," cracked Lucas.

"What? No," Mike shouted. He respected El way too much to let it go that far that quickly. Not that he was opposed to doing that at some point...

El had only known Mike for about 10 minutes, but she already felt extremely loyal to and protective of him. He had rescued her, after all. She didn't really understand this conversation about *sucking*, but it seemed like Mike was being made fun of. She found herself getting mad, not just at his friends but at Max, too.

She fixed Max with a steely glare. "Mike was helping me get shake out of my eyes. Where were you, Max? Oh yeah, you were throwing food, too."

"Hey," Max retorted, "I'm sorry, okay? I shouldn't have abandoned you like that. I kind of just got caught up in everything. You know? Someone throws a burger at you, and you throw something back."

"No, Max, I don't know. I don't get why people would just throw food for fun. You're supposed to eat it. I'm sure a lot of poor little kids would love those fries you were throwing."

El's voice had gotten progressively more choked up, and Max's face softened. She suddenly realized that El was referring to her time at the lab, and she felt horrible about it.

Max moved forward and gathered El in her arms, whispering apologies again and again. The minute Max's arms enveloped her, El broke down.

While all this was happening, Mike was looking past El and Max at his friends. They were all confused at the emotional turn this had taken. But they were good guys, and they wanted to offer their support in any way they could.

After a few moments, the girls broke apart, El wiping her eyes. Will, who had been silent this whole time, spoke up. "El, is it? I'm Will. I'm a friend of Mike's. I don't really know you, but if you ever want to talk about anything, I'm a good listener."

Lucas stepped forward next. "Hey, El. I'm Lucas. I'm always happy to help out a friend in need, even new friends."

El looked at the group of guys. "You want to be my friends?"

"Definitely," said Dustin. "Max said you were awesome when we were looking for you. And we always love to have new friends. I'm Dustin, by the way...at your service!"

Dustin, ever the ham, got down on one knee and opened his arms. El giggled and gave him a hug. "And I always like to make my friends laugh!"

"And what about me," questioned Max. "Are you guys my friends now, too?"

"Hell yeah," said Lucas, a little too enthusiastically. Everyone glanced at him questioningly, and he chuckled sheepishly in response. "I mean, yes. You're pretty cool. A little scary, but cool."

Max snorted. "I am not scary."

"Uh, yes you are. I saw you stuff a French fry up someone's nose out there. Plus, you have a skateboard."

"Newsflash...having a skateboard doesn't make you scary."

"Oh I'm sorry, does it make you *totally tubular*?"

"I do not say totally tubular!"

"EXCUSE ME! CHILDREN," Dustin cut in, "Can you please pipe down? We've got to get out of here. Benny told me he would reschedule us for another day...once the place has been cleaned up."

El let out a little whine. "But we never got to hear you guys play."

Mike smiled comfortingly. "We can play for you anytime we want, El. Just name a time and we'll do it."

"*Yeah* you will," Max quipped, causing the other guys to stifle their laughter.

"Anyway," Mike cut in "You guys want to go out for some food or ice cream or something? And actually eat it?"

"Actually, we probably need to get going, El," Max said, looking at her watch. "Your dad said we needed to be home by 9, and it's 8:45."

El could feel her body deflate. She'd loved being out for the night. It had been an eventful time, that's for sure.

"I don't want to go," she said quietly, looking directly at Mike.

He smiled tenderly back at her. "I don't want you to go, but I don't want you to get in trouble with your dad either. We can hang out another time."

This seemed to placate El, and they all walked outside together, chattering animatedly. It made El smile when she saw Troy helping Benny pick up food and trash from the food fight. Served him right.

"Hey El," Mike began, letting the others walk ahead, "It was awesome meeting you tonight. I really would like to hang out with you another time."

El's stomach clenched in excitement. If she could do a backflip, she'd probably be doing one now. "I'd like that, too, Mike."

Mike let out a shaky exhale. "Can I have your phone number?"

"Yes," El nodded feverishly. "Do you have any paper?"

"Uh..." Mike dug around in his pockets and fished out a napkin and a pen. He wrote down his number, tore it off, and gave it to El. "This is mine. Write down yours."

El eagerly pocketed Mike's number, wrote hers down, and gave it to him. "I can't wait to see you again," she said honestly.

"Me too! That is, I can't wait to see you, too."

"El, shouted Max, "We gotta go!"

El turned to see Max straddling her bike, and began to walk towards

her. But something inside her told her to be bold. She ran back towards Mike and kissed him quickly on the cheek. "Thank you for rescuing me," she said.

Mike let out a little squeak in surprise, but cleared his throat to try and cover it up. "Anytime. I'll call you tomorrow."

El smiled and bit her lip. "Okay. Night, Mike."

"Night, El."

She ran back to Max again, smiling giddily. She couldn't believe she'd actually done that. As she hopped on the back of Max's bike, she let out a little squeal.

"Someone's happy," Max commented as she began to pedal towards the cabin.

"Max, he's so cute," El gushed.

"Yeah, yeah. I know he thinks you're cute, too. It's super obvious. When are you seeing him again?"

"Soon, I hope. He said he'd call me tomorrow."

"Woah, woah, woah," Max said in surprise. "You gave him your phone number? What are you going to tell Hopper when he calls?"

El hadn't thought about that.

Well, shit.

Hola, readers! I hope you're enjoying my little story! Some summer fluff and fisticuffs this chapter. Please leave me a review.

Chapter title is taken from the great Bryan Adams...as is the story title and Chapter One as well. He was HUGE in the 80's (listen to the albums "Cuts Like a Knife" and "Reckless!"), and is still touring today. Bryan was a major source of inspiration for me, and I want to try and use one of his songs as a title for each chapter!

4. Chapter 3: Straight from the Heart

Disclaimer: I don't own Stranger Things or any of the characters in this story.

Chapter 3: Straight from the Heart

Mike paced back and forth in his basement the next morning, butterflies in his stomach. His mind was still reeling from the previous night.

...The gig that was, then wasn't...

...The food fight...

...El's hand in his hair...

Fuck. He should have grabbed her and kissed her, not just stand there like a statue.

But NO! If he did that, he might have scared her off. She'd already been through enough, what with getting splashed in the eyes with milkshake. And anyway, what if she didn't want him to kiss her?

Okay now that's just stupid, Mike, he thought. *SHE kissed ME first!* She probably would have been okay with him kissing her.

But what if he was bad at kissing? He'd never kissed anyone before.

"Gahhhhhh."

He let out a moan of frustration and sunk down onto the comfy sofa. Seeing an opened bag of Doritos, he grabbed a chip and ate it. It was never too early for Doritos. A little stale, but still edible. Oh, the standards of a teenage boy...

After Mike had finished off the bag of Doritos, his brain started working again. El was the prettiest girl he had ever seen. She had a great sense of style, obviously had an interest in music, played along with his British accent...it was just easy with her, and he wanted to

get to know her better.

Taking a deep breath, he decided to just jump in and call her.

He grabbed the phone off the hook – a little too aggressively, as it let out a faint ring noise – and dialed her number.

He was not, however, expecting to hear a familiar gruff voice pick up.

His eyes went wide. "Chief Hopper?"

Jim Hopper was many things. Hawkins Chief of Police. Avid watcher of "Magnum P.I." Maker of triple decker Eggo extravaganzas. Adopted father to El Hopper.

Ready to start receiving phone calls from teenage boys? Hell no.

"Yeah," he responded questioningly back at the pipsqueak on the other line. "Who do I have the displeasure of talking with this morning?"

"Um, Mike Wheeler, sir. Why are you at El's house? Did something happen? Are she and her parents okay?"

Hopper's heart started to beat a little quicker than usual. How did Mike and El meet? He knew she was supposed to go to Benny's last night with Max, but he had hoped they would just go, listen to music, and come home...be a little more inconspicuous. NOT be giving boys their phone numbers. Plus, there was the big question...how much did Mike know about El? Over the last few weeks, he'd only started telling a select few people the story that had been concocted about how and why he suddenly had a 15-year old in his care.

"This is MY house, dumbass. And I AM her parent."

Hopper smiled as he heard Mike sputter into the phone. *That's right, kid*, he thought. *You don't know who you're dealing with.*

"Uh...what?"

"Yep, she's my daughter. She didn't tell you that?"

"No, um..."

"Listen, you seem to be a little confused. Why don't you try back when you can say more than just 'uh' and 'what', okay? Have a nice day." With that, Hopper hung up the phone with a satisfied cackle.

He knew who Mike Wheeler was. Admittedly, there could have been a lot worse calling his house. Mike was a good kid – squeaky clean with an even squeakier clean family. But...he was still a teenager, and teenagers were known to be assholes some or most of the time.

...And speaking of teenagers, he heard footsteps coming down the hallway from the bathroom. It was time to get some answers.

El woke up late, having been physically and emotionally tired after the events of last night. But she awoke with a smile on her face, remembering her time with Mike. She couldn't wait to talk to him today.

But...oh no. She still had to have a chat with Hopper about the fact that Mike was going to call. No matter. She needed to shower first. That always helped her calm down.

As El lathered up her hair to the desired consistency, she took a deep breath in and out. Her shampoo was lavender scented. She fell in love with the scent after Hopper brought her a bouquet of lavender after he got home from work one day. She took one sniff and was hooked. That original bouquet was dried now, but she still kept it hanging in her room. Plus, it was purple!

Purple was not a color she got to see a lot of. There were plenty of grays and browns in the confines of the Hawkins lab, but not purple. It was one of her favorites. To El, purple meant freedom.

She got out of the shower and was starting to dry off when she heard Hopper laugh. Probably watching "Magnum P.I." again. He couldn't get enough of that show. Sometimes, she and Max would watch it with him. Hopper thought himself a perfect replica of Tom Selleck,

and would often say so. Max would then quickly add that just because he had a mustache, that did not mean he looked like Tom Selleck. Maybe that's why Hopper picked up a couple of those loud, button-down shirts from the store...

Her stomach growled, reminding her that she needed to eat breakfast. She threw on some clothes and quickly padded down the hallway. "Good morning, Hop."

Hopper turned around, an overly sweet smile on his face. "Morning, sunshine," he greeted enthusiastically. "How's my girl this morning?"

El frowned in confusion. He was never this chipper in the morning. Until he had about 5 coffees in him, Hopper was pretty monosyllabic.

"Fine...why are you so happy?"

Hopper carried two plates of Eggos to the breakfast table and gestured for El to sit down. "I can't be happy? I've got a good job, a tasty breakfast, and a beautiful daughter...I'm a lucky guy."

"Okay. Cool," El said, still mildly confused.

"Yep, cool," agreed Hopper. "So tell me, how was Benny's last night? Was the music good? Food good? Give any boys your phone number?"

So that's what this was about, thought El. She put her fork on her plate and looked down, her face heating up. "How did you find out about that?"

"Mike called when you were in the shower. He seemed pretty shocked it was me on the other end of the phone – got all tongue-tied. I told him to call back when he sounded a little more sure of himself."

El gasped. "You WHAT?! What else did you say to him? You weren't mean to him were you?"

"Hey, don't you think I should be the one asking questions? You give a boy your phone number and he calls here...I mean, what else happened? Did you tell him where you live or about your powers? Have any cozy chats about the lab? You have to be careful about

what you say, for Christ's sake!"

"I'm not stupid," El said, defensively. "I didn't tell him anything. Mike is nice. He helped me."

Hopper snorted. "Helped how? He stick his tongue in your mouth or something?"

El's eyes began welling up at the tone of Hopper's voice. She wordlessly got up from her seat and walked into her room, slamming the door behind her.

"Shit," Hopper muttered, laying his head in his hands. He needed a cigarette. Digging around in his pockets, he found one, walked onto the porch, and lit it. He took a few deep drags to clear his head, then started to try and process the conversation they'd just had.

He hadn't meant to be cruel. God knows HE was the one sticking his tongue in plenty of ladies' mouths when he was a teenager. That was rude to say. In his heart of hearts, he knew that El would never jump in so quickly...or even Mike for that matter. It didn't excuse any of his behavior, but Hopper was worried sick. In the back of his mind, he was always worried that someone from the lab was going to find out where El was. Sure, they'd covered their tracks wonderfully. El was now allowed out a little more, and her appearance had changed a lot. But that didn't mean the risk was completely gone.

Adding to Hopper's worry was that El was growing up fast. She had started getting interested in clothes, she was so smart – adding to her vocabulary every day, and had started noticing boys. Up until this point, they'd only been the unattainable kind in movies or TV shows. But the boys in the real world, these were the ones who could hurt her. He wanted to stop her from getting hurt for as long as possible, but he knew that wasn't realistic. Getting hurt was part of life, and part of growing up. Still though, if Mike and El were going to be hanging out more, there were going to have to be some ground rules.

Stubbing out his cigarette butt on the porch railing, Hopper went back inside to try and coax El out of her room. They needed to talk.

He approached her door with some trepidation. You did not want to

piss off a telekinetic teenager.

"Hey El," Hopper said softly, "Honey, can you open the door please?"

"Go away," she replied as she thumbed through one of the magazines Max brought over.

"El, please. I want to talk to you."

"Well, I don't want to talk to you." El could think of lots of things she'd rather be doing right now. Talking with Hopper was not one of them.

"That's fine. I'll talk, you listen." Hopper slid down the wall until he was sitting next to her closed door. "Sweetheart, I'm sorry about what I said to you earlier. It was cruel. Even if you HAD kissed Mike, it's not any of my business to throw it back in your face. I just worry about you, and I want you to be safe."

"I WAS safe with Mike," El replied. Shit. So much for not talking to Hopper.

"I know you were. Much as I hate to admit it, Mike's a decent kid. But you growing up...that's not all that worries me. Every day, I worry that one of those assholes from the lab is going to find you – that they're going to take you away and I'll lose you. And I can't lose you, El," Hopper explained, his voice beginning to tremble.

There was silence for a long time on the other side of the door. Hopper thought maybe she had gone back to ignoring him. However, he was pleasantly surprised to hear the doorknob turn and for the door to swing open.

He didn't waste time, quickly scrambling to his feet and walking inside. El was seated on her bed, ankles crossed and arms folded across her chest.

Hopper gestured to the foot of the bed. "Can I sit down?"

El shrugged. "I guess."

Damn teenagers, he thought. So infuriating and so loveable at the

same time.

They sat in silence for a few minutes. Hopper thought it was going to be him that broke the silence. Surprisingly though, it was El who spoke first.

"You won't lose me, Dad."

Hopper grinned hugely, despite the worry he still felt. For the most part, El continued to call him Hopper or Hop. But every so often – and it seemed to be becoming more frequent now – she would call him Dad. It made his insides turn to mush.

"Thank you, sweetheart. But you just don't know. We've done all we can to protect ourselves, but what if it's not enough? What if the bad men find you?"

"Then I'll crush their brains," replied El matter-of-factly.

Hopper started to laugh until he saw how serious her face was.
"What?"

"I have powers. I'm stronger than them."

"Yeah, you probably are. But you can't go draining your energy like that. I see what happens to you when you use your powers too frequently."

It was true. El would turn practically comatose and would need to spend hours resting and refueling.

"That's why," Hopper continued, "I think it would be better for everyone if the bad men just didn't find you at all. That's why we've played it safe for so long."

"But I'm tired of playing it safe," confessed El. "Last night was fun. I want to keep having fun."

Hopper patted her leg. "I know you do, kid. And I do want you to have a social life. So that's why I think...it might be okay to continue that."

El's eyes widened infinitesimally. "What does that mean?"

"It means...that you can invite Mike over here."

"REALLY?! What about Lucas, Dustin, and Will?"

Christ, there were more of them, thought Hopper. "Now hang on. We've got to set a few guidelines first. We will start with Mike, and ONLY Mike. I'm going to pick him up and bring him here. I'm going to observe. Maybe if I'm generous, I'll feed him something. There will be no funny business on my watch. We are going to sit and talk. And only then will I determine whether or not you can continue to see him."

"Can we go in my room?"

"Why would he need to go in your room?"

"So that we can listen to music. I like music. He likes music. He plays guitar."

"Okay, we'll listen to music. We can start with my favorite song – *You Don't Mess Around with Jim.*"

El rolled her eyes. "Nooooo. Not that song."

Hopper looked offended. "What's wrong with it?"

"You do that weird dance when you play it. It's creepy," El explained with a shudder.

"I do not dance creepy. ANYWAY, we're getting off subject," he huffed. "Do we have a deal?" With that, Hopper stuck out his hand for El to shake.

The thought of seeing Mike again was too much to resist, even with Hopper's stupid restrictions in place. El smiled and grasped his hand. "Deal."

"Okay, good. Now, I'm starving so I'm going to finish breakfast. But I believe you have a phone call to make."

El frowned in confusion. "A phone call?"

"Jesus, who have we been talking about this whole time? Call Mike, and tell his ass to be ready to go later."

She didn't have to be told twice. With a squeal, she jumped off the bed and ran out to where the phone was.

Hopper let out a breath he didn't realize he'd been holding. He really hoped he wouldn't regret this.

Hola, readers! What did you think of our overprotective/snarky Hopper? He's so much fun to write. Anyway, the drama will start to ramp up a bit in the coming chapters. I'm looking forward to seeing how it all plays out.

I'm going to try and crank out another update before I leave on vacation next weekend. So keep your eyes peeled.

Of course, this chapter's title inspiration is courtesy of Bryan Adams! Please leave me a review!

5. Chapter 4: Somebody

Disclaimer: I don't own Stranger Things or any of the characters in this story.

Chapter 4: Somebody

As he drove to Mike Wheeler's house, Hopper kept the radio off. Usually, he liked to listen to music on the road, but not today. He needed a clear head.

It was an interesting mix of emotions that Hopper was feeling. For starters, he was nervous. The more people that knew El's history, the riskier it was for her. In all likelihood, they didn't have anything to worry about with Mike. But he couldn't be too careful. Mike was going to get the full debriefing: El's real backstory, and the story that the public was allowed to know.

In addition – and in true Dad fashion – Hopper was feeling a little territorial. He knew that having an interest in boys was just part of growing up. But this was HIS daughter first, and it would do Mike well to remember that.

Pulling up to the Wheeler home at the end of the cul de sac, Hopper put the car in park and was preparing to walk up to the front door, but there was no need. Mike must have been watching for Hopper, because as soon as the car door opened, so did the Wheeler's front door.

Jesus, how long does this kid plan on staying, thought Hopper. Mike had on his backpack – which looked like it was about to pop, it was so full – and was holding his guitar in one hand and a red rose in the other. Great.

Hopper rolled his eyes as Mike opened the back door and put his bag and the guitar back there. He kept hanging on to the rose carefully.

"Wheeler," Hopper greeted shortly.

"Chief," responded Mike just as shortly.

They rode in silence for a while. Mike was drumming his fingers softly on his leg, excited to see El, but curious about the cloak-and-dagger way it was happening. He had volunteered to ride his bike over, but El said Hopper wanted to pick him up and bring him there. Not to mention, he had a ton of questions. How the hell did he not know Hopper had a daughter? How come she'd never gone to school with them all? Where does the Hawkins Chief of Police call home?

Why were they driving deeper and deeper into the woods?

He decided to just get the ball rolling. "So Chief, how's it going?"

Hopper snorted. "That remains to be seen."

Mike gulped. "Oh, okay. Well, how is El doing?"

"You'll find out soon enough, kid."

This wasn't going at all well. Hopper was acting like he was mad at him, but he'd done nothing wrong...at least as far as he could tell.

"Um...did I do something? You're not in a very talkative mood," said Mike.

"Perfectly fine, Michael," Hopper replied brusquely. "Just because I'm not filling the silence with awkward questions, doesn't mean I'm not fine."

Sheesh. Someone was touchy. "Okay, um, but you didn't really answer. Did I do something wrong?"

Hopper sighed. This kid was annoyingly persistent. "Yes and no... how's that?"

"Confusing," Mike said honestly.

"Well, we're practically there, so you won't be confused for much longer."

All Mike could see were trees. "Where is 'practically there?' We're in

the middle of nowhere."

Suddenly, Hopper turned sharply off the main road and onto a small one-lane dirt road, practically hitting trees as he sped through the forest.

Mike screamed for his life. He was going to die. Hopper was going to murder him and chop him up into little pieces. He was never going to play for El...or take her out on a date...or kiss her.

The car screeched to a halt, and Hopper got out. Mike was frozen in his seat. The sun was starting to set a little, creating an almost eerie glow in the dark forest.

The sound of Mike's door opening broke him out of his trance. He screamed once more at the sight of Hopper holding an axe, and covered his face with his hands. "Oh my God, please don't hurt me. Don't hurt me!"

"Why the hell would I do that?"

Mike slowly took his hands down away from his face. Hopper was still holding the axe, but was raising his eyebrows at Mike. His mustache twitched slightly, suggesting he was holding back a laugh.

"We're in the woods. You're holding an axe. I'm pretty sure you don't like me very much. What am I supposed to think?"

"Well let's see," Hopper began, "Our house is right over there. I picked up the axe – which was laying on the ground right outside your door – so you wouldn't step on it. As to whether or not I like you, I don't even know you. But El likes you. And she'd have my hide if anything happened to you. Just don't be a fuck up. Then I'd have to use this on you for real."

Mike's eyes had started to adjust to the growing darkness, and he spotted a cozy little cabin through the trees – the windows all lit up. Taking a deep breath to steady himself, he slowly got out of the car and grabbed his things.

"Watch the trip wire, kid," Hopper warned as they walked.

Following Hopper's lead, he stepped over a seemingly invisible wire strung between two trees. But upon further inspection, noted the fishing line about a foot above the ground.

Hopper waited for Mike to join him on the porch of the cabin, then knocked twice, once, three times. "*Us*" in Morse code, thought Mike. *Interesting.*

After a brief pause, Mike heard the door unlock. It swung open to reveal a smiling El, dressed much more casually than the night before. She had on jeans, a t-shirt, and a short-sleeved flannel shirt over that. He couldn't help but notice that she had on purple toenail polish.

She was the cutest thing he'd ever seen.

El nervously paced the floor of the cabin while she waited for Hopper and Mike to return. She desperately wanted Hopper to like him, and hoped that he wasn't doing anything on the drive to make Mike feel uncomfortable.

The plan was to give it to Mike straight. She wanted him in her life, so telling him everything seemed to be the right thing to do. She could only hope he'd take it well. If he wasn't going to, it was best she knew now before things got serious. But El wasn't terribly concerned. Mike had been so sweet and kind to her yesterday, and she had a feeling he would be very accepting about who she was.

Before long, El heard the rumble of Hopper's car, and then what sounded like a scream. Strange. Maybe just an animal out in the woods.

Tap-tap. Tap. Tap-tap-tap.

Not wanting to appear overly eager, El took a few breaths in to compose herself before unlocking and opening the door.

A smile lit up her face as she saw Mike standing there. He was wearing a light blue polo shirt, which looked great against his pale skin. Like last night, his long neck was exposed, and El desperately

wanted to kiss it.

"Hi," she said shyly.

"Hey," Mike replied, trying to act nonchalant on the outside. On the inside, the butterflies in his stomach were having a dance party.

They both stood staring at each other in silence for a while until Hopper cleared his throat. "Look, this is really fun. But can you please let us in, El?"

She chuckled nervously and stepped aside. Hopper strode straight over to the refrigerator and cracked open a beer. Mike stopped in front of El and put his backpack and guitar on the floor. He held the red rose out to her that had miraculously survived the insane drive to the cabin.

"This is for you. It's from my mom's garden. I got rid of all the thorns so you wouldn't hurt yourself."

El's cheeks reddened, and she took the rose from Mike, holding it up to sniff. "It's beautiful. Thank you. She grows these?"

Mike chuckled. "Yeah, like almost obsessively. She swears by planting them in a mix of, like, Miracle Gro and eggshells."

"What?"

"Yeah, super weird. But whatever works, I guess."

El nodded and gestured towards the kitchen. "I'm just going to put this in water. Do you want to sit down?"

Mike turned and looked towards where Hopper was semi-reclined in his La-Z-Boy. He gulped, but agreed nonetheless. "Yeah, sure."

Walking over to the sofa, he sat down and began to drum his fingers on his leg again. After a few moments of avoiding looking at Hopper, Mike chanced a glance. But he immediately looked back down at his lap, as Hopper was fixing him with an intimidating stare.

Get back in here quickly, El, Mike thought.

After what felt like an eternity, El joined Mike and Hopper in the living room. She tucked a strand of hair behind her ear and looked down shyly. "I'm sorry it took so long. I was trying to find the perfect place for the rose."

"Oh yeah? Where is it," asked Mike.

"On my bedside table," said El, "So that I can see it when I wake up and go to sleep."

Mike smiled so hugely, it felt as though his face was going to crack in half. "Cool."

"Ahem," interrupted Hopper, "This is all fine and good, but the three of us need to have a little talk."

Right...the reason they were all there. In the excitement of his arrival, El forgot that she needed to tell Mike her story. If they were going to have some kind of relationship, he needed to know the truth.

She turned to face him. "Mike, I want to get to know you more. But there's something I need to tell you...about myself. You have to promise to never tell anyone this. Ever."

"Or else your ass is grass," added Hopper.

"Uh...yeah. I promise."

Mike was confused as hell. He could only hope whatever she had to say wasn't bad – that she wasn't sick or dying or something.

"Mike, about a year ago, I came to live with Hopper. He's not my bi-o-log-i-cal dad," she explained, sounding out the larger word slowly. "He found me."

"Found you where? Like a foster home or something," Mike asked.

El shook her head. "No, on the street. I escaped. From Hawkins Lab."

Mike was trying to make sense of what she was saying. "But...the lab...I thought the government did like secret projects and

experiments there."

"Yes. I was one." With that, El pushed aside the blue hair tie on her wrist to reveal the number *011* etched in her skin.

"Holy shit," exclaimed Mike. "What does that mean?"

"Eleven. El. That's me."

"Your real name is Eleven? They called you that there?"

"Yes."

"But only WE know that, Wheeler," Hopper interrupted. "The public will know her as Eleanor. Got it?"

Mike nodded quickly. "Yeah." Turning back to El, he asked, "What do you mean you were an experiment? What happened?"

El thought it best to show Mike, rather than tell. She grabbed Hopper's empty beer can and placed it on the coffee table in front of her and Mike. Concentrating as hard as she could, the can soon was crushed, as if someone grabbed it and squeezed.

Mike couldn't believe what he saw. He picked up the can and studied it, running his fingers over the new grooves in it. After a moment, he looked at El, who had a small trickle of blood coming out of her nose. "Oh my God...you're bleeding. Are you alright? Can I get you a tissue or some ice?"

"Slow your roll, Wheeler," said Hopper. "She's okay. But you're telling me that the first thing you ask her after she crushes a can with her mind is, 'Can I get you a tissue?'"

"Well, yeah." Mike looked at Hopper like it was the most obvious thing in the world. "I just wanted to make sure she was okay."

"Hmph," Hopper snorted. But there was a faint trace of a smile on his face. So far, Wheeler seemed like an alright kid. Some other punk might have asked about El's powers right away without any concern for her wellbeing.

"Does the bleeding happen all the time after you do that," Mike asked El.

She nodded. "Yes. The more I focus, the more that comes out. Not sure why it happens, but I always have to rest."

"Don't want to use up all your energy. I understand," replied Mike.

He was taking this a lot better than El and Hopper thought he would. Hell, he was taking it better than HE thought he would. You don't meet someone with telekinesis every day.

Hopper stood up. "Tell you kids what – speaking of energy – why don't I get dinner started? Pasta alright?"

El nodded, and Mike replied, "Yeah, that sounds great."

After Hopper walked into the kitchen, El grimaced slightly. Mike, ever the observant one, noticed her face change.

"You okay, El," he asked quietly.

"Yeah, it's just that," she glanced behind her to make sure Hopper wasn't listening closely, "Hop's not the best cook."

Mike frowned. "But it's pasta. You boil it and dump sauce on...simple, right?"

"No," replied El. "He always overcooks it. It tastes like mush."

"Gross," Mike said with a shudder. "Why don't you tell him his cooking sucks?"

"Because it means a lot to him – cooking for someone. He told me. I don't want to hurt his feelings."

Mike remembered the stories he heard on the news about Hopper's daughter – the one that passed away years ago. And of course it was a small town, so everyone knew when he and Diane got divorced. It was probably pretty lonely until El came along.

He nodded. "I get it." Suddenly, an idea popped into his head. "Hey

El?"

"Yes?"

"Do you like pasta?"

"I'd like it more if Hopper cooked it better."

Mike coughed to hide his laugh. He didn't want Hopper to know they were talking about his cooking skills, or lack thereof.

"Okay, well, my sister and her boyfriend sometimes go to this place that has awesome pasta – or so they say. Enzo's, I think it's called. You want to go with me sometime?"

El looked up at Mike, a shy smile gracing her face. "Like a date?"

Mike smiled sweetly back at her. "Yeah, if you want it to be."

El glanced towards the kitchen to make sure Hopper wasn't looking in their direction. When she was satisfied he wouldn't interrupt, she scooted forward so that her and Mike's knees were touching. "Okay," she said.

Before Mike could process her answer, El leaned forward and gave him a quick kiss on the lips. It was just a swift brush of her lips against his, but that didn't matter. The two of them sat, red-cheeked on the sofa, grinning happily. El darted her tongue out to taste her bottom lip, and Mike wanted nothing more than to kiss her again – this time, longer.

Maybe after our date, Mike thought.

They were going on a date...holy shit.

These two lil cuties! Despite the abundance of Mileven in this chapter, there WILL be drama coming...I just couldn't help it, though. What did you think of Hopper's drive with Mike to the cabin? I might be a little biased since it IS my story, but I was cracking myself up. I could totally picture something like that happening. And I JUST found out that Hopper and El's secret knock was "us" in Morse code...

so cute.

Did anyone catch the "American Beauty" reference? I might be dating myself with it, as the movie came out in 1999 (I think), but it's absolutely brilliant.

Good news! I'm going to be taking my laptop on my trip with me, so I may get some writing done. No promises on a new chapter during the next couple weeks, but I'll try. Please leave me a review! I'd love to know what you think.

6. Chapter 5: This Time

Disclaimer: I don't own Stranger Things or any of the characters in this story.

Chapter 5: This Time

There wasn't a whole lot that rattled Eleven, what with everything she had been through. Being used as a top-secret government experiment really puts things into perspective. Getting ready to go on a date with the cutest guy in the world, however, was a whole other ball of wax.

She jiggled her leg nervously as she sat in front of her mirror. Trying to put on her shimmery eye shadow was a nearly impossible task with all the shaking she was doing.

Max could sense that El was having some difficulties, and looked up from the magazine she was reading. "Want me to do that," she asked, glancing at the eye shadow.

El, ever the stubborn one, shook her head. "No thanks."

"You sure? You seem pretty nervous."

"I'm not nervous, Max," El persisted, raising her voice slightly. But at that precise moment, she happened to glance at one of the bottles of nail polish on her dresser. It didn't stand a chance against the intense emotion coursing through her and shattered at once, the red liquid pouring out.

"Shit," Max muttered, standing up. "I'm getting a towel. Stay there, and don't move," she warned El. "When I come back, I'm finishing your makeup. No arguments."

El nodded weakly. She didn't know what was wrong. Her time spent with Mike the other day went fine – great, even. After their kiss, they'd eaten dinner. When they weren't choking down the overcooked pasta and sharing grimaces, they were making heart eyes at each

other. Mike also played her a song on his guitar before he left. El hadn't thought it possible, but she liked him even more after that.

Before he'd begun playing, Mike hemmed and hawed, suddenly shy. He didn't want to screw up, especially not in front of El. But El had calmly taken his hand and given it a gentle squeeze, an encouraging smile on her face.

Mike started out quiet, but grew louder and more confident as the song went on.

"Just give it to me straight from the heart. Tell me we can make another start. You know I'll never go, as long as I know it's comin' straight from the heart."

El practically melted into a pile of goo as he sang, his slightly raspy voice blending well with the tender lyrics. It took everything in her willpower not to attack him with kisses when he finished, as Hopper was also watching.

"El! Helloooo!"

El glanced up to see Max standing next to her, arms folded. "I asked if you could scoot over so I could do your makeup. Where were you?"

El frowned and slid over in her seat. "I was right here."

"I know that, space cadet," Max said with a snort. "Your body was here, but your head wasn't. What were you thinking about? Oh let me guess...a super tall guitarist with fluffy hair and freckles. Am I right?"

"Was it that obvious?"

"Not at all, just to anyone with eyes," Max quipped sarcastically. She took the eye shadow from El and began making swift passes of the light pink, shimmery powder over El's eyelids. "What do you have to be nervous about anyway? You like Mike, and he's crazy about you."

"But this is a DATE, Max," El whined. "This is a big deal."

"Only if you make it one," replied Max. "Half the battle is wondering whether or not the guy likes you, and you KNOW Mike does. Go have

a great time!"

Max finished with El's eye shadow, and El got a good look at herself. The light color and shimmer was making her brown eyes pop. A shy smile crept across her face. "Pretty," she whispered.

Max smiled at her handiwork. "Hell yeah, it is. Mike will love it. Just a little blush, and you'll be done."

El slipped into her own little world again as Max finished up, but then...a familiar song. She let out a shriek as the opening chords to "Somebody" by Bryan Adams came on the radio. Mike had let El borrow his "Reckless" tape before he left the cabin that night, and "Somebody" was one of the best songs on it.

She jumped up and pulled Max with her, the both of them laughing as they twirled together. When the chorus came on, they couldn't resist belting out the lyrics.

"I need somebody, somebody like you! Everybody needs somebody. I need somebody. Hey, what about you!"

They were so engrossed in their mini karaoke session, that they didn't notice Hopper standing in the door, a bemused expression on his face. Their silly antics briefly made him forget that his baby girl was going on a date tonight. When he remembered, however, the gruff face returned.

The girls saw Hopper at this exact moment, and began laughing again. "Geez, chief," Max choked out, "Are we that bad at singing?"

"Well kid, now that you mention it, I don't foresee any Grammy's in your future," he quipped. "But as much as I hate to interrupt your little recording session here, it's time to drop El off."

The butterflies in El's stomach came back in full force, and she stopped dancing immediately. Max went over to El and slung her arm around her shoulders. "You've got this, space cadet. Just tell yourself to relax and have fun."

"Relax. Have fun," El said with a nod.

"Exactly," replied Max. "It'll be great, and I can't wait to hear about it!"

El could only hope she was right.

About 15 minutes later, Hopper pulled up in front of Enzo's. Much as he hated to show emotion, he was probably about as nervous as El. Mike had proven himself to be alright, but Hopper was still suspicious. This was still a teenage boy, going on a date with his teenage daughter. He didn't want El rushing into a relationship so quickly. He wanted her to stay a kid for a little while longer.

The sound of El's throat clearing made Hopper snap back to reality. "You okay, Hopp?"

"Yeah, kid I just," he trailed off. Hopper had been about to tell her exactly what he'd been thinking, that El shouldn't throw herself into a relationship so quickly – that she was only 15 years old and there'd be plenty of time for boys in college. But he took one look at her in her blue dress and just crumbled. She looked so damn pretty, and he was proud to be her dad. "I just love you, you know that," he asked.

She smiled. "Yes. I love you, too."

Hopper never got tired of hearing that. "I'm glad. And I'm proud of you, and the young lady you've become. You're growing up so fast."

"Hopp," El whined quietly. Dad mushiness always made her feel a little embarrassed.

"I know, kid. I know. But I just wanted to tell you that. You look beautiful tonight, and Mike seems like an okay guy."

El nodded fervently. "He really is."

"Just in case he isn't, though," Hopper began, "I put some pepper spray in your purse. Don't be afraid to use it."

"Dad, NO," El protested.

Hopper had to admit that sometimes he enjoyed poking fun at El. It

was his duty as a dad, after all. "I'm just saying...I was a teenage boy once upon a time, too. Just...please be careful, okay? Promise?"

"I promise."

"Good. Now if I know Mike, I bet he's already inside waiting for you," Hopper said with a smirk. "Why don't you head in before he hyperventilates."

El didn't have to be told twice. She eagerly hopped out of the car and strode inside, nearly missing Hopper's shouted reminder that she be ready to be picked up by 9PM. At first glance, Enzo's seemed cozy and inviting. The lights were dimmed, and each table had a candle on it. The couples seated at the tables were well-dressed, and looked so elegant with their glasses of wine. El knew she wasn't old enough to drink it, but she wondered what it would feel like to hold one of those glasses.

"Ahem."

A throat clearing caused El to look up. The maître d' was looking at her expectantly behind the front podium. "May I help you, young lady?"

El blushed, hoping that she hadn't been thought stupid for staring at everything. "Sorry," she said quietly. "I'm here to see someone. For dinner."

The maître d' glanced at his clipboard before nodding knowingly. "You're not by chance meeting a Mr. Michael Wheeler, are you?"

El's eyes brightened at the sound of his name. "Yes."

"Ah, he said we'd be expecting you. Right this way."

A pang of nervousness hit El again as she followed the man closer to Mike. She really hoped she wouldn't act stupid or spazzy. And she REALLY hoped he'd like her dress.

She didn't have to wait long. As soon as they walked around a sculpture, Mike came into view. And boy did he look good tonight. Not that he never looked good. But the tan suit jacket, red tie, and

light blue button down he had on were really working in his favor.

El's outfit was having a similar effect on Mike. His mouth hung open and he sat frozen in his seat. The blue dress looked beautiful on her, and with her makeup, El's face looked like it was glowing.

Thankfully, Mike snapped out of his frozen stupor as El got closer, standing and pulling out a chair for her. He wouldn't be Karen Wheeler's son if he wasn't well-mannered. She taught him from an early age to be a gentleman in the presence of a lady.

"I believe I've found your date, sir," the maître d' said as they reached the table. "Why don't the two of you have a seat, and I'll make sure your waiter gets your drink orders."

"Thank you," Mike replied. Turning back to El, he took her hand, her shy smile widening as their eyes connected. "Hi," he whispered.

"Hi," El whispered back.

Mike narrowed his eyes playfully. "Why are you whispering?"

"Um," El stuttered with a giggle, "I don't know, but we're still whispering."

They laughed then, their faces turning red in embarrassment and excitement. "Sorry," Mike began, "I guess I was just nervous."

"Me too," El admitted.

Mike gestured at their table. "We should sit down. Can I help you with your chair," he asked.

"Sure." Sitting down on the chair in front of Mike, she felt him gently push her forward. El then began to peruse the menu as he sat down.

Her eyes landed on a picture of red wine in one of the nice glasses she saw earlier. "It's too bad I can't get one of these," she said, pointing at it. "It's so pretty."

Mike laughed. "The wine? Why, needing some liquid courage for tonight?"

"What, no," El protested, her face getting red again. "The glass just looks pretty. I saw people using them when I walked in."

"Ohhhh," Mike said. "I understand now. Yeah, they are pretty cool. My mom and dad have some nice wine glasses at home that they only bring out for special occasions. I think they got them for their wedding."

Just then, their waiter came up and asked what they'd like to drink. Mike nodded at El to go first. She bit her lip as she thought for a moment, inadvertently driving Mike crazy. He wanted nothing more than to kiss that lip of hers. He still couldn't believe his good fortune, that she'd want to go on a date with a nerd like him...

"Mike?"

El's voice broke him out of his thoughts, and he met her curious gaze.
"Sorry, what?"

"Your drink. What would you like? I got a Coke."

"Okay, yeah a Coke," Mike replied, still trying to play catch up. "That sounds good."

"Very good, sir," said the waiter, turning away. Before he could completely walk away though, Mike thought of something and called him back.

"Excuse me, could we get those in wine glasses, please?"

"Sorry, sir? Wine glasses?" The waiter looked at Mike as though he had two heads.

"Yeah. It's just that my date was admiring them earlier. I know we're not old enough to drink wine out of them, but could we drink the Coke out of them instead?"

This wasn't something they normally did at Enzo's. But the waiter looked at the sincere, hopeful expressions on the kids' faces, and couldn't help but oblige. They just seemed so sweet. And anyway, this reeked of a first date. If this boy was trying to impress his young lady, he didn't want to stand in the way of that.

"Of course you may. I'll be right back."

As he walked away from the table, he heard an excited squeal come from that direction. He knew he'd made the right decision, and that made him smile.

"Now don't forget," Mike trilled in his fake British accent, "Whenever you drink from the wine glaaahhhsssss, you must stick out your pinkie fingerrrrr."

Ever since they got their pop in the fancy glasses, they'd been taking full advantage of the situation. After all, pop in a wine glass was nothing if not enjoyed whilst sticking your pinkie finger out.

El giggled like mad and copied Mike best as she could. She and Mike were on their second glasses, and the sugar content was making these already excited teenagers positively giddy.

"Like 'zis," she asked.

Mike laughed and nodded. "Yes! Very good. With even more practice, I'd say you'd be the next lady-in-waiting for the Queen of England."

El snorted and shook her head, taking a careful sip. "Mike, can I ask you something."

"Anything."

"When did you start doing the accent?"

He shrugged. "I can't even remember. I must have been really little. Maybe it was a show or movie I saw on TV. I do remember talking in a British accent so much one time, that my mom actually told me to stop. She said that I wasn't British, so I shouldn't talk British."

"But you were excited," said El with a frown. "Who says you're NOT?"

"I knew I liked you for a reason," Mike admitted, then clapped his hand over his mouth. I mean, it had been pretty obvious, but Mike wasn't used to being so forward.

El blushed and looked down. "I like you, too. I think you're the cutest boy I've ever seen."

It was Mike's turn to blush. "Really? I'm not too freckly? My hair isn't too crazy?"

"No. You're just right," El said honestly.

"How do you do that," Mike asked softly, a dreamy look in his eyes.

El tipped her head to the side in confusion. "Do what," she asked.

"Know what to say. You're so forward and open. I really like that."

El was suddenly self-conscious. "I know. I'm still learning."

That's not what Mike had meant. Yes, it was true that El's straightforwardness might have a little something to do with her upbringing and lack of opportunity to test social skills. But Mike also thought that was just El. He appreciated that about her.

Mike shook his head. "No. YOU'RE just right."

The two of them sat grinning at each other for a moment, interrupted only by the waiter placing their dishes in front of them. El thought she'd never smelled anything better than the spaghetti in front of her. Mike had ordered lasagna, and was eagerly placing his napkin on his lap.

Before they started eating, the waiter came back with a handheld cheese grater filled with parmesan cheese. "Would you like some extra cheese," he asked El.

Would she?! Was that a trick question? El LOVED cheese, and nodded eagerly for him to start grating. When he began, however, a wicked idea popped into El's head. A quick glance around showed that no one was looking in their direction. El then discreetly focused on the cheese grater, narrowing her eyes slowly until...

POOF!

All the cheese that was in the grater fell out onto El's plate. There

was so much of it, that a small pile lay on top of her pasta.

"Oh my g-g-g-goodness," the waiter stuttered, dumbfounded, "I'm terribly sorry, young lady. I have no idea what happened."

El discreetly wiped her nose and looked innocently at him. "It's okay."

"Is there anything I can do to help you? I can get you another plate of spaghetti."

"No thank you," El said demurely. "I'll be alright."

As the waiter walked away, a satisfied smile appeared on El's face. She spread out the cheese across her whole plate and dug in, letting out a satisfied groan at the taste. "Mmm, this is so much better than Hopper's," she admitted, her cheeks full of pasta.

Meanwhile, Mike was studying El with a mix of disbelief and awe. He hadn't initially realized that she'd used her powers until he saw her wiping her nose. Then she'd handled herself so calmly. It was... impressive.

After a few more bites, El noticed Mike staring at her. She was suddenly self-conscious. "What is it," she asked. Her face fell then. "That was bad what I did...wasn't it?"

"No! No, no, no," Mike answered, jolting out of his reverie. "I'm sorry for just sitting here all frozen. I guess I just..." he trailed off, struggling to find the words. "You're just...you're amazing," he finished simply. "Are you alright? I mean, with your nose and everything?"

"Yes," said El, reaching over and grasping his hand. "It's like Hopp said, it always happens after I do something like that. But I'm fine, I promise."

"I'm glad you are. I just don't want anything bad to happen to you, El."

"I know. Like I said, I promise I'm fine. I wouldn't do something that I thought would hurt myself."

"Okay," Mike said with a nod. Suddenly, he started chuckling. "You must have really wanted that cheese, then."

"Oh yes," said El seriously. "You can never have enough cheese." Then, pushing her plate slightly towards him, she added, "Want some?"

Mike cocked his eyebrow. "Really? I thought you just said you can never have enough cheese."

El shrugged. "Yeah, but I like you."

"Ah, I see," Mike said playfully. Taking a forkful of cheese from her plate, he popped it into his mouth. His eyes widened as he chewed. "Jesus, I'm glad you do."

The rest of their dinner went in a similar fashion – playful banter and delicious food. Mike let El try some of his lasagna, and she almost regretted ordering spaghetti it was so good. For dessert, they shared a cup of chocolate mousse. All the while, they kept sharing shy but flirtatious glances.

Before they knew it, dinner was over. Ever the gentleman, Mike paid for El's meal. As he stood up and helped her with her chair, he asked, "What time is Hopper coming to pick you up?"

"9:00. What time is it now?"

"8:30," answered Mike. "We still have 30 minutes. Is there anything you'd like to do?"

If El was being honest with herself, she really wanted to kiss Mike's face. She'd been staring at him all evening. Her face grew hot at the thought.

Mike noticed her blushing. "What is it? You can tell me you know."

Seeing as how they were now outside, El decided to just show him.

Her hand tangled in that wonderfully thick hair of his, and she stretched up on her tip toes to press her lips against his. Mike's eyes widened in shock for a second, then closed as he grew used to the

feeling of her sweet little kisses. As this was still new to the both of them, their kisses were a tad bit out of sync. But after a few moments, they seemed to be getting the hang of things.

El began to shiver a bit, as the sun had gone down a while ago. Depending on the day, summer nights in Hawkins could get on the cool side.

Mike pulled back a bit, his and El's labored breathing punctuating the air. "Are you okay," he whispered.

"I'm a little chilly," El admitted.

Mike couldn't believe his lack of foresight, but he'd been otherwise distracted...

"I'm so sorry! Let me give you my jacket." He quickly shrugged it off and draped it around El's shoulders. Considering how much taller he was than her, the jacket looked almost like a second dress. But El looked adorable in it.

"Thank you," she said quietly, her face plastered with a giddy smile. Maybe she'd get lucky, and Mike would forget about the jacket. She could go on smelling his scent forever. Well, at least for the foreseeable future.

"You're welcome," replied Mike. The way he was looking at El, you'd think she'd hung the moon. He was in awe of her abilities, her strength, her forwardness, and how pretty she was. But...he was also a teenager. He'd be lying if he said he didn't want to kiss her again tonight.

Slowly, he brought his hand up to caress her cheek, reveling in how soft it was and that it grew pink under his touch. El leaned into him, closing her eyes. She never wanted this night to end.

The both reached out at the same time, pulling each other close for another round of kisses. Mike wrapped his arms tightly around El, making her feel safe and protected. The night was quiet, save for the sound of their lips meeting and retreating. Occasionally, El would let out a breathy sigh, and it would make Mike shiver in delight.

But unfortunately for the distracted pair, their time was about to end for the night. You see, all that kissing had made them lose track of time, and a loud honk of a horn made them look up in shock.

"WHEELER," came an angry shout from the car, "Extract yourself from my daughter and say goodnight!"

"Oh shit," Mike whispered. "I gotta go."

El's face dropped. "I don't want you to."

"I know, neither do I. But I'll call you tomorrow, okay? First thing."

"Tomorrow," El agreed, the smile reappearing on her face.

Mike gave her hand a final squeeze, then grabbed his bike from the nearby rack. He waited until El was safely in the car before biking off, the grin on his face a mile wide.

Several miles away, a storm was brewing. Not a storm of the weather variety, but one that would affect Hawkins just the same.

Later that night, electricity around the town went out for a short period of time, the ground trembled, and a lone figure stepped from out of the woods into a clearing.

Safely inside and tucked into bed, El sat bolt upright and screamed.

I'm baaaaack! My vacation last month was AMAZING! I was in London, and it was an absolute dream. Long story short, I want to go back. Hopefully soon. But because of that, it took me an extra long time to get back to writing. Sorry for the wait, but I hope it was worth it.

So what did you think of the Mike and El date?! I just love these lil cuties. But something's coming...what can it be? Please leave me a review. Thank you for reading!

7. Chapter 6: I'll Always Be Right There

Disclaimer: I don't own Stranger Things or any of the characters in this story.

Chapter 6: I'll Always Be Right There

When El walked in the door from her date with Mike, it was like she was floating on a cloud. With each step she took, she felt lighter than air, and she couldn't wipe the grin from her face. She sat down on her bed and sighed happily.

The date had been perfect, and she couldn't believe how nervous she'd been beforehand. Mike looked amazing, the food was delicious, and THOSE KISSES...

El let out a happy squeal into her pillow and hugged it tightly, kicking her legs out in front of her.

Meanwhile, Hopper was stewing out on the sofa with a can of beer. At the sound of her squeal, he rolled his eyes. From the minute El climbed in the car after her date, she'd had this dopey grin on her face and was staring off in her own little world. Hopper was trying to rationalize with himself and remember what it was like to be a teenager. But the last thing he wanted to see when he picked El up was her and Mike attached at the lips.

He shuddered in revulsion and chugged the last of his beer. Once they'd both slept on it, he'd have to have a talk with her about PDAs, mainly WHY they weren't a good idea. He once saw a couple making out in the middle of the street and almost get hit by a car. Therefore, it was two pronged: he wouldn't have to look at his kid kissing some boy, and she'd be safe.

Hopper smiled serenely, the plan solidifying in his head. Yes, the world would soon return to its natural order. With that in mind, he got up, went into his room, and got ready for bed.

It wasn't long after El's head hit the pillow that the dream began. It started innocently enough...

Mike and El were holding hands, and walking along the train tracks in the woods. The moon shone brightly in the sky, and the tracks were lit by the fireflies that inhabited those woods. It looked so romantic.

"Just a little longer, El," Mike said excitedly.

El smiled brightly, looking forward to whatever surprise he had in store for her.

After a few moments, they stopped. Mike hung back behind El, and put his arms around her waist. "Okay, close your eyes."

"What?"

"Just close them, no peeking! It's a surprise."

El did as she was told, the air seeming to come alive with the sounds of insects and night birds with her sight gone.

"Okay you can open them on three." Mike's lips were now close to her ear, and he whispered, "One...two...three."

El opened her eyes, and the chorus of sounds she'd been hearing abruptly stopped. She couldn't see anything at all. The fireflies were gone.

A queasy feeling sprung up in the pit of her stomach. "Mike, what is it," she asked, turning around. But the breath caught in her throat as she gazed at the figure behind her, who was most certainly NOT Mike. The face of the figure was one she'd only seen in photos, and someone she knew could not possibly still be alive.

"Where's Mike," El asked urgently. "What did you do to him?"

The man chuckled. "We disposed of him. He would have just gotten in his way."

El began hyperventilating. "What did you do," she asked again, her raised voice shaking. "Gotten in whose way?"

He gestured to the dark sky above them. "Him." Suddenly a bright flash of lightning lit up the night, and El took the opportunity to look up. The flash was short, so she couldn't be sure, but what she saw looked like a massive, hulking shadow. It was terrifying.

She shrieked and looked back at the now cackling man. "But don't worry," he began, his eyes taking on an unearthly glow, "You'll see him again soon enough."

A ghastly sounding gurgling inhale came from the trees, to the right of where they were standing on the tracks. El was frozen. She thought she'd never hear that sound again. It was only once, but she'd never forgotten it.

The man grabbed the back of her shirt collar and threw her down on the ground. As El tried to get up, he stepped on her upper back, forcing her down again. Leaning down, he whispered, "Goodbye, El."

El began to feel the ground tremble slightly as heavy footsteps approached. About 5 feet away, they stopped. All El could hear was the sound of her own pounding heart, thudding against the ground. Suddenly, she heard a roar...

Safely inside and tucked into bed, El sat bolt upright and screamed. She was soaked in sweat, and her skin was burning up. Being telekinetic and all, she'd had some weird dreams throughout her life, but nothing quite this scary and realistic.

Hopper came running into her room, still half asleep and out of breath. But he took one look at El's anguished face and wrapped her in a tight hug. She was very warm, but shivering at the same time. He pulled back to have a look at her, and his eyes widened in surprise at the small stream of blood coming from her nose.

Grabbing a tissue from her bedside table, Hopper dabbed it under El's nose. "Sweetheart, what happened? Was it a nightmare?"

Tears began rolling down her cheeks as the memory of the dream came back. "It seemed so real. Mike and I...we were walking in the woods, then he disappeared. And then I saw...it looked like..." she trailed off in disbelief.

"Saw what, El?"

"It looked like Billy, Max's brother. He said that Mike was gone, and that he was just going to get in the way of a shadow in the sky. And then," this was the part that was difficult to think about, "I heard it."

"Heard what?"

"That thing," she whispered. "What I saw...what I heard...before I ran away."

Hopper was the only person El had told about the monster. It was right after she had moved in with him. He'd sat her down and made her spill every last little detail that she could remember about her time in the lab, and her escape. He didn't want there to be any secrets between them.

The day she saw the monster was both the best and worst day of her life.

That day, the doctors had wanted to extend the reach of her mind farther than ever. But in their quest to discover the secrets of the Soviet Union, something even more sinister was found. As El walked through the blackness of the void, she had expected to hear men speaking in another language. She'd spent some time practicing before, and knew what to listen for. Instead, she heard what sounded like chewing. But it wasn't normal chewing, like what she did when she ate. It sounded sloppy, and like whatever was eating was tearing its meal apart.

As she edged closer to the dark creature, she heard a gurgling inhale. It was disgusting, and made her shudder. Suddenly, the thing turned around and roared at her, exposing its gaping mouth and endless number of sharp teeth. El screamed bloody murder, pounding on the glass of the tank she was submerged in. All around her, doctors and scientists looked on, confused. They couldn't see what she was seeing, couldn't imagine the horror she'd been exposed to.

That was all about to change, though.

The ground beneath their feet began to tremble and they froze in

place, both in fear and bewilderment. As El continued to scream, a loud crack made them turn quickly. The wall opposite the bath was beginning to crumble from the inside out. This seemed to jar the men and women out of their stupor, and a melee ensued. Someone had the sense to pull El up and out of the tank. But after she was out, she was on her own. Everyone was running frantically – some trying to get out, some simply trying to figure out what was going on. El had the good sense to take off her weighted vest and replace it with a hospital gown that she saw on the platform. But after that, adrenaline took over and she ran.

El figured that the doors would be heavily guarded, so she ran for the first thing she saw – a large round pipe. It was just big enough for her to crawl into, and she crawled for her life. She didn't stop to catch her breath until the large room was out of sight. But even then, it was just a few moments later that she began to move again. As she continued to crawl up and out, El thought she heard a faint roar, but she couldn't be sure. All she knew was that she needed to get out. Once she began to hear birds chirping, and the pipe opened up to the outside, she felt like she could finally breathe...

...Until, of course, she had the horrible nightmare. She had wanted to just forget all about the events of that day. But nightmares like the one El had reminded her that sometimes, you can't do that.

Hopper reached out and tucked a lock of hair behind El's ear. "Oh sweetheart, I'm sorry. But you're safe here, and I hope you know that. The monster you saw can't get you here."

"But what if I did something? What if that day...I let it out?"

"El, I don't think that's possible. What you saw was in your head. Well, not like 'in your head,' like you were imagining it. But in that other part of your brain, of your consciousness..." Hopper trailed off sheepishly. "Sorry, it's hard to explain."

El nodded wordlessly, trying to convince herself that he was right... that there was no danger. "But what about Billy?"

Hopper let out a breath. "What happened to Billy was a horrible accident. That was a sad day for this whole town. All the guys at the

station went to his funeral. There's absolutely no way that he could come back."

"And Mike? Do you think he's okay?"

Hopper wanted nothing more than to roll his eyes, but he reigned it in for El's sake. "Yeah, kid. I'm sure he's fine."

El, however, wasn't so easily convinced. "Can I talk to him?"

"Sweetheart, it's in the middle of the night. You can call him in the morning."

"No, now," she insisted, her eyes narrowing.

Rather than start an argument with El after she'd just woken up from a nightmare, Hopper grudgingly conceded with a nod. "Fine, but make it quick."

El leaped out of bed and dashed around the corner to the phone, dialing the number she knew by heart. It took a few extra rings, but finally, she heard Mike's sleepy voice on the other end. "Hello?"

She began to cry in relief and exhaustion. "Mike," she choked out.

"El!" He certainly was awake now. "What's wrong? What happened?"

"I had a bad dream...wanted to make sure you were okay."

"Was I...not okay in the dream?"

El sniffled. "No, I don't think so. You disappeared, and I couldn't find you."

Mike wanted nothing more than to reach through the phone and give her a hug. "That will NEVER happen," he said fervently. "You'll always be able to find me, El."

"Okay," she replied shakily. "So you're alright?"

"Yes, I promise I'm fine." Suddenly, an idea popped into his head. "Tell you what, why don't I come over in the morning? We can have

breakfast and just hang out. If you'd like, we can even invite the others over."

"That sounds good. Can you bring your guitar, Mike?" The thought of him playing and singing for her again made her all warm and fuzzy.

He chuckled. "Yes, I think that can be arranged."

Her mood brightened considerably at this. Unfortunately, a glance over at Hopper told her that she should wrap up her phone call. He gave her a pointed look and tapped on his watch.

"Mike, I've got to go. Hopp said I couldn't be long."

He yawned and nodded, the tiredness beginning to come back. "Okay. But I'll talk to you in the morning – and see you in the morning."

El bit her lip and smiled. "I can't wait."

"Night, El."

"Night, Mike."

For as horrible as El felt when she woke up, that's how happy she now felt after talking to Mike. She was so happy that he was okay. Even better now that she would see him in the morning.

She practically skipped back into her room, much to Hopper's amusement. "So, I take it Wheeler's okay?"

"Yes," El replied brightly.

"I take it that I should also prepare for our house to be invaded by teenagers in the morning, too?"

"Dad..."

"I know, I know. I'm just teasing you." He gave El a hug, then stood up. "Alright, sweetheart. I think it's time you try to go back to sleep, okay?"

"Okay."

El got back under the covers and pulled the blanket up to her chin, making Hopper chuckle. "You're safe here, El. No monster is going to get to you...especially not with you under all those blankets."

El giggled. "Thanks, dad. Goodnight."

"Goodnight, sweetheart."

It wasn't long after that El drifted off to sleep, her mind filled with visions of Mike, his guitar, and his lips.

Unbeknownst to Hopper and El, about an hour after they fell back to sleep, all the lights in Hawkins went out for a few minutes.

Also unbeknownst to them, the doctors and scientists in Hawkins Laboratory were once again running for their lives. The force they thought they had contained over the past year was tired of being shut away.

If it had its way, Hawkins was going down.

Uh oh...trouble's coming, folks. But there will be more Mileven in the next chapter as well! I hope you're liking what you're reading. I know I'm enjoying writing. Any Gilmore Girls fans out there? The part about Hopper seeing a kissing couple almost get hit by a car was inspired by Rory and Jess crossing the road while making out – "We're going to walk right in front of a car one of these days..."

Who got excited over the Stranger Things Season 4 announcement?! Chapter 1...The Hellfire Club. Any guesses on what it means?

See you all next time. Please leave me a review!